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**NEWSLETTER**

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**A YEAR AGO,  
YOU CHANTED “USA!”**

**YOU STILL CHANTING NOW?**





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### *A Year Ago, You Chanted “USA!” You Still Chanting Now?*

A year ago, the scene was unmistakable. The galleries were loud. Social media was louder. Supporters packed the confirmation hearing chanting “USA! USA!” as if a long-awaited counter-revolution had finally arrived at the Pentagon. They weren’t just cheering on their “champion” nominee – they were celebrating a promise.

The promise was sweeping: accountability for Afghanistan, restitution for troops purged under “unlawful COVID mandates,” a revival of the warrior ethos, a return to standards, and a reckoning with a bloated bureaucracy many believed had turned hostile to the very people it was meant to serve.

It was confident. It felt patriotic. It was, now looking back in hindsight, egregiously misguided.

One year later, with those promises largely unfulfilled – and in several cases actively contradicted – the chants have faded. In their place is a quieter, more uncomfortable truth: worse than lack of reform, as seen in previous administrations, is the betrayal of trust that has come with the broken promises from this one.

### **Afghanistan: We Were Told “Accountability Is Coming” – We’re Still Waiting**

Few phrases were repeated more often during the confirmation process than



“accountability is coming.” It was meant to be definitive – a break from years of evasion following the catastrophic withdrawal from Afghanistan, which ended America’s longest war in chaos, killed 13 service members at Abbey Gate, and shattered trust among those who served.

Yet as Brigadier General (Ret.) John Teichert has argued [in a recent op-ed](#), the Afghanistan catastrophe was not a single tactical failure or a bad day at the airport – it was the culmination of years of senior-level deception, institutional cowardice, and systematic evasion of responsibility. Decisions were made in Washington that ignored conditions on the ground, silenced dissenting commanders, and treated inconvenient facts as obstacles to policy rather than warnings demanding course correction.

Teichert notes that senior leaders repeatedly provided optimistic assessments to Congress and the American people that were flatly contradicted by classified reporting, internal assessments, and battlefield reality. When the collapse came, those same leaders quickly narrowed the scope of blame – focusing on the final weeks rather than the years of strategic malpractice that made collapse inevitable.

It is precisely this pattern – truth deferred, accountability diluted, responsibility fragmented – that made Hegseth’s promise resonate. To reinforce that pledge, the administration announced a new Afghanistan accountability effort, [including the appointment of a high-profile figure in Stu Scheller](#), associated with demanding answers after Abbey Gate. For Gold Star families and veterans, this mattered. It suggested urgency, seriousness, and a willingness to confront uncomfortable facts.

Nearly a year later, the outcome mirrors the failures Teichert warned about. There have been no public findings, no meaningful accountability actions, and no senior leaders relieved. The inquiry has produced silence rather than consequence — if any real inquiry actually exists.



## Administrative Reform – “Complainers in the Driver’s Seat”



The Secretary was explicit about his view of internal accountability systems, arguing publicly in [his September 30th speech](#) to the military's leadership<sup>2</sup> that Inspector General and Equal Opportunity processes had put “complainers, low performers, and ideologues in the driver’s seat.”

Rather than focusing on documented failures – retaliation, years-long delays, inconsistent standards – the rhetoric reframed complainants themselves as suspect. Policy changes followed that raised reporting thresholds, expanded subjective credibility assessments, and increased command discretion.

The predictable result will be silence: fewer reports, greater fear of reprisal, a further dilution of an already impotent system. But even more pronounced: in one swift arbitrary stroke, Hegseth’s “reforms” inverted the burden, placing it on those brave enough to speak.

Is it reasonable to ask whether these so-called reforms are less the product of data-driven analysis and more the result of the Secretary’s own negative



experiences with administrative processes earlier in his career? For personal frustration, however understandable, is a poor substitute for evidence-based policy.

There is no data to support the claim that complainants broadly drive outcomes in the IG system. In fact, Department of Defense Inspector General statistics show extraordinarily low substantiation rates (1.7%, per the DoDIG's own "Whistleblower Celebration Day" postings this past summer), meaning the overwhelming majority of complaints are already dismissed or unsubstantiated under existing standards. The system is not over-empowering complainants; it is already highly skeptical of them.

By further raising barriers, increasing stigma, and expanding subjective screening, these reforms do not fix abuse – they dilute a system specifically designed to surface institutional risk. IG and EO processes exist not to make leaders comfortable, but to identify hidden problems early, before they metastasize into scandals, readiness failures, or loss of life.

Weakening those early-warning mechanisms may reduce short-term friction for senior leaders, but it does so at the expense of the institution itself. That is not reform. It is deterrence - [just as our DoDIG complaint filed in November](#) highlighted; a complaint which was, just last week, quietly unsubstantiated (just like the other 98.3% throughout the Department are, per the DoDIG's own reporting).

### **“Warrior Ethos” – Fighting the Wrong War**

Military failure was framed as a loss of warrior ethos, with solutions aimed at cultural and cosmetic targets. The Secretary has repeatedly offered prescriptions for problems that were never root causes of defeat.

We did not lose wars because our people were out of shape. We did not lose wars because some senior leaders were overweight. And we did not lose strategic advantage because bases or ships were improperly named.



These were not the reasons Afghanistan collapsed. They were not the reasons Iraq stagnated. They were not the reasons trust between the force and its leadership eroded.

Yet once the Secretary took the reins, the application of his version of “warrior ethos” produced a stark contradiction. Service members who had served honorably – many for decades, including combat veterans – were suddenly ushered out of the force not for misconduct, incompetence, or failure in battle, but solely because their personal values didn’t align with this administration’s (in an eerily similar fashion to those ushered out by the previous administration for their beliefs). Whatever one’s views on policy, removing experienced, trained, and deployable personnel on that basis does not strengthen readiness, lethality, or cohesion. It weakens them. The result: the calls for renewed “warrior ethos” have actually eroded from our common defense.

Focusing on physical fitness optics, culture-war grievances, or symbolic renaming fights may generate applause, but it does nothing to correct the structural failures that actually cost lives and wars. Further, unapologetically and unceremoniously ushering out honorably-serving members simply because their personal beliefs didn't align only serves to further disenfranchisement, not readiness. Symbolic toughness is not strength, it is rather mere theater.

### **The China Drumbeat – And the Real Enemy *Inside* the Wire**

China is a serious strategic competitor, and no serious defense professional denies that. But the fixation on China as the singular, overriding threat has become a convenient distraction from a more immediate danger – one that does not require a future war to confront.

The most present threat to U.S. military effectiveness is internal. It is the entrenched bureaucracy – particularly within the Senior Executive Service – and



the political operators who prioritize self-preservation over mission, process over outcomes, and career insulation over truth.

This class of institutional actors thrives on delay, ambiguity, and infighting. While leaders beat the drum about China, these bureaucratic power centers exploit that urgency to avoid scrutiny, suppress bad news, retaliate against whistleblowers, and outwait reformers. The result is paralysis disguised as prudence. The pattern is no longer theoretical. It is observable.

In one case, Brigadier General Christopher Sage, a career Air Force general officer, challenged the lawfulness of COVID-era directives, prevailed through the Board for Correction of Military Records, [and still saw senior civilians move to negate that binding decision](#) – demonstrating how SES officials can override both commanders and formal legal remedies when outcomes threaten institutional preferences.

In another, [investigative reporting from Catherine Herridge](#) revealed that Capt. Cody Kirlin, a fighter pilot who suffered a serious spinal injury during high-G training, was denied Line-of-Duty medical care by an Air Force OBGYN – with no relevant specialty expertise – attributed the injury to a *bicycle ride*. The denial was not a medical judgment grounded in operational reality; it was a bureaucratic determination that spared the institution liability while leaving the service member without care.

These are not isolated incidents, but rather proof of concept. Civilian workforce reform was promised, yet the Senior Executive Service remains largely untouched, retaining the ability to override commanders, medical boards, and even legally binding correction decisions. Accountability stops where bureaucracy begins. We witnessed at the outset of this administration a ceremonial purging of General and Flag Officers, but what of the entrenched civilian management of the Department - the true obstructionists of progress? When do they go?



## A Return to Standards – Except When Inconvenient

A renewed emphasis on enforcement of standards were promised. When they applied upward, they evaporated.

In 2025, [the Department of Defense Inspector General concluded that Secretary Hegseth disclosed sensitive operational details related to U.S. strike planning in Yemen through unauthorized channels](#), confirming that operational security was compromised and that U.S. service members could have been placed in jeopardy. In any other context, with any active duty service member, such a finding would have triggered swift administrative or punitive action.

Instead, [Hegseth publicly characterized the Inspector General’s findings as a “total exoneration,”](#) reframing a confirmed OPSEC breach of his own making as vindication. That rhetorical maneuver mattered – not because it convinced the force, but because it signaled that standards would be applied selectively when violations occurred at the top.

Junior officers and enlisted service members would lose careers for mishandling information far less sensitive than live strike planning. When the Secretary of Defense violates the same rules and faces no consequence – while declaring himself cleared – discipline becomes conditional and credibility collapses.

Selective discipline does not preserve standards. It destroys them.

This episode also laid bare the profound impotence of the Department of Defense Inspector General itself. Despite substantiating an operational security violation at the highest level, the DoDIG possessed neither the authority nor the institutional backing to impose consequences or compel corrective action. Its role was reduced to documenting misconduct, while enforcement was left to the very political leadership implicated in the violation.



An oversight body that can identify wrongdoing but cannot ensure accountability is not a deterrent – it is a mere record keeper. The message to the force was unmistakable: even when violations are proven, the system lacks the will or power to act if the offender sits high enough in the hierarchy.

### Enter our CJCS: "More-of-the-Same" Caine



For many who hoped this administration would finally break the cycle, the disappointment has become familiar. Several service members close to the Foundation have reached out directly to General John Daniel “Raizin” Caine, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, seeking recourse – not for political favors, but for basic accountability, oversight, and enforcement of the law.

They have been met, almost uniformly, with the same response: *this isn't within my authority*. When pressed further, inquiries disappear behind layers of counsel – shielded by what many now bitterly describe as a Praetorian Guard of lawyers, deployed not to resolve injustice but to contain it.

This pattern mirrors what service members have seen for years at the highest



levels of uniformed leadership. When accountability points upward, jurisdiction suddenly evaporates. Authority is disclaimed. Responsibility is diffused. Everyone agrees something went wrong – yet no one, apparently, has the power to fix it.

For those who believed new leadership at the Joint Chiefs would mean new outcomes, this has felt like more of the same: empathetic language, procedural deflection, and a quiet return to institutional inertia.

Heralded as a change agent, Caine has proven himself to be more of the same flavor of General Officer / Flag Officer (GOFO) we have not only come to expect, but the type of leader who is now cultivated in our military: a self-serving careerist who prioritizes professional progression above most all else. Some sources close to Caine describe him as such. But it is here we should not be disappointed, as Caine is simply materializing to be the same ol’ run-of-the-mill flaccid self-servant which is embodied by so many of his peers of today. In that vein, Caine has not betrayed us, he has simply done what today’s GOFOs are rewarded for doing: toeing the party line – and little else of real impact.

### **Red Hill: Accountability Deferred, Harm Ongoing**

The Red Hill fuel storage facility disaster poisoned the drinking water of thousands of service members, civilians, and families stationed in Hawaii – an institutional failure whose consequences are still unfolding. From the beginning, service members were reassured that safety was paramount and accountability would follow.

In 2024, the Department of Defense Inspector General issued a report explicitly stating that the [U.S. Navy should investigate whether it violated federal laws](#) or regulations before, during, and after the Red Hill spill. That recommendation was clear and unambiguous.



To date, that investigation has not occurred.

Instead, accountability stopped low. This year, [two Department of Defense civilian employees were indicted](#) for falsified reporting connected to Red Hill. Yet not a single senior military leader has been held accountable for the decisions, oversight failures, or misleading assurances that characterized the crisis.

That includes the Pacific Fleet commander at the time, who oversaw the reporting provided to federal regulators and approved public messaging that reassured families about water safety while risks persisted. Rather than being removed or disciplined, he was later promoted to command the nation's largest combatant command – a decision that many affected families view as a profound betrayal.

Meanwhile, the harm continues. Water at Joint Base Pearl Harbor–Hickam is still not reliably safe. Low levels of fuel and total petroleum hydrocarbons remain in the system, and the true exposure pathways into homes were never fully remediated. Despite repeated assurances about safe housing, porous pipes, water heaters, and appliances have not been systematically replaced.

There has been no hazardous-duty incentive pay or back pay for service members assigned to contaminated-water cleanup, defueling, or degassing operations tied to Red Hill's closure. There is no mandatory medical monitoring program for impacted service members or families. And military housing leases still do not disclose the contamination history, preventing new residents from making informed decisions about the health and safety of their children.

Red Hill is not a closed chapter or a historical footnote. It is a living case study in how accountability is deferred, harm is externalized onto families, and senior leaders advance while those who spoke up bear the cost.



## COVID Mandates: Rhetoric Without Restitution – and Lifelong Consequences

Promises to make whole those discharged under COVID mandates were among the most celebrated commitments. The reality has been far harsher – and far more revealing of institutional priorities.

There has been zero accountability for senior leaders who enforced what courts and policymakers later acknowledged were unlawful orders, including violations of service members' religious liberties. Not one flag officer who aggressively pushed the mandate has faced investigation, censure, or removal. Several of the most outspoken enforcers now serve at the highest levels of the Department.

Service members who were discharged have not been made whole financially. Despite promises of “full back pay,” any income earned as civilians after being forced out is subtracted from back-pay calculations – a penalty that effectively punishes them for surviving after separation. Restitution, in practice, has been partial and conditional.

Reinstatement has been more symbolic than real. Of more than 8,600 service members involuntarily separated and roughly 90,000 who ‘voluntarily’ separated under coercive conditions, only 86 had been reinstated as of November 2025. The process itself is Kafkaesque: applicants must navigate correction boards, re-enter MEPS (Military Entrance Processing Station - where new recruits undergo initial screening), and endure months – sometimes years – of bureaucratic delay.

The reinstatement framework also rests on a false distinction between “voluntary” and involuntary separations. In reality, service members were coerced under threat of career destruction, benefit loss, and public stigma. Treating these cases differently compounds the injustice rather than correcting it.



Compounding the harm, many service members who complied with the mandate now report vaccine-related injuries. Whether these injuries are being systematically acknowledged, tracked, or treated remains unclear – and largely unaddressed by leadership.

Addressing the wrongs of the COVID-19 mandate has consistently ranked below secondary initiatives, signaling unmistakably that restitution was never a true priority. The result is not just personal hardship. It is institutional damage. Service members learned that obedience did not guarantee protection, and that even years of honorable service could be nullified by administrative fiat.

### **So... Still Chanting?**

A year ago, they packed the chambers. Americans, boisterously extolling their "champion" - the telegenic Fox-frontman-turned-Secretary Pete Hegseth, had come to celebrate much-needed reform, and the man anointed to usher in that reform.

A year has come and gone and real reform - change that improves for the common defense, that strengthens our forces, that re-elevates us to credible global power - has simply not materialized. Instead, what has followed has been a series of either cosmetic applications and/or regressive flights of fancy.

Whatever the label, it has done nothing to address the true root cause of our military's failings: TRUST.

[As we briefed to the Air Force's Inspectors General last summer](#), trust begets readiness. A force that trusts in its leadership serves dutifully. A country that trusts in its military institution desires to serve dutifully. Neither are occurring, and it is the ever-mounting list of betrayals discussed above that is



directly contributing to that trust deficit. Mr. Hegseth et al. has, thus far, seemingly been more than content with that.

**"USA! USA!!"**



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Graphic:

<https://thehill.com/homenews/senate/5083782-live-updates-pete-hegseth-confirmation-hearing/>

<https://www.cnn.com/2025/06/11/politics/dan-caine-trump-invasion-claim-analysis>